



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/50/221
16 June 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fiftieth session
Item 81 of the preliminary list*

MAINTENANCE OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Letter dated 16 June 1995 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of
the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to you concerning the letter dated 1 June 1995 from the Permanent Representative of Croatia to the United Nations addressed to you (A/50/207). Upon instructions of my Government, I have the honour to state the following.

The aggression of the Croatian Army against a United Nations Protected Area (UNPA), Sector West (western Slavonia), on 1 May 1995 has had dire consequences on the Serbian population as a whole. According to information available so far, the Croatian Army killed more than 3,300 civilians and over 1,000 poorly armed soldiers of the Republic of Serb Krajina (RSK) after they had accepted the cease-fire and ceased resistance.

Fully aware of the crimes against humanity and the breaches of humanitarian law committed in UNPA Sector West, the Zagreb authorities have denied access to United Nations forces to investigate the crimes (see report of the Secretary-General, dated 9 June 1995, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 994 (1995) (S/1995/467)), in an attempt to divert the attention of the international community from the tragic fate of the Serb people in those parts. To achieve those ends, the Permanent Representative of Croatia to the United Nations sent the above-mentioned letter providing distorted information on certain events or pure fabrications.

* A/50/50/Rev.1.



In the letter of the representative of the Zagreb authorities, it is alleged that the attacks on some facilities of the Catholic church in the region of Banja Luka, eastern Slavonia and the Province of Vojvodina in Serbia, "represent a cowardly reaction to the successful military operation by Croatian forces that liberated western Slavonia". The ensuing conclusion is that the responsibility for the attacks should also be borne by the "Belgrade authorities" due to their "anti-Catholic" campaign.

Understandably, the authorities that were ready to commit an aggression against a UNPA (in which heavy arms and other military equipment of the army of the RSK were, in accordance with the Vance Plan, in the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) depots), that were involved in brutal mass murder of the Serb population in that area, that burned the dead bodies and washed the streets and roads to cover up the evidence of those massive crimes and that have undertaken to expel the remaining Serb population, have no other choice but to attempt to blame others for their own inhuman conduct and policy of ethnic cleansing.

How can a military action in western Slavonia be called liberation when the entire population in the territory was either killed or expelled for the sole reason that they were of Serb nationality and Orthodox faith? How can it be called liberation when the Croatian units, for example, in the village of Paklenica, east of Novska, killed the entire Serb population? Other than being Serbs, what was the guilt of Pantelija Kovacevic (age 74), Vera Kovacevic (age 65), Desanka Vukotic (age 68), Petar Vukotic (age 70), Vukasin Bozic (age 70), Dragica Pavlovic (age 58), Aleksija Raus (age 43) and Vesna Raus (age 19), burned alive in the cellar of the house where the infirmary in Paklenica was located?

Unfortunately, the case of Paklenica is not the only one. The same happened in Medari (where, among others, four members of the Vukovic family were killed, including 10-year-old Gordana and four-year-old Goran); in Nova Varos and other places. The character of the Zagreb authorities is best illustrated by the cowardly act of aerial bombardment and artillery fire against a column of 2,000 refugees en route to Okucani-Gradiska, during which 200 women and children were killed.

The official authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have never approved either ethnic cleansing or the abuse of shrines or other facilities of other beliefs. The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia strongly denies the charges in the above-mentioned letter concerning its alleged negative policy towards the Catholic population or the property of the Catholic Church. The authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia make a clear distinction between the policy of present-day Croatia and that of the Catholic Church as a whole and the Croatian people. Consequently, the Catholic Church in the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia enjoys the same status and rights as the Serbian Orthodox Church. Their clergy, including the highest-ranking ones, regularly perform their religious duties and their property enjoys absolute protection.

On the other hand, all bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church have been expelled from Croatia, their residences have been razed to the ground and most

Orthodox churches have been destroyed (by the end of 1992, in the territories of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, 139 Orthodox churches had been destroyed and 155 extensively damaged).

In the above-mentioned letter, the Zagreb authorities list the attacks on certain facilities of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Srpska (failing to mention that the attacks have been condemned by the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Republic of Srpska). They ignore the fact that, in their May aggression, Croatian forces totally destroyed the Slavonian eparchy. The eparchy was set up in the sixteenth century in those areas (then, as today, the Serb population constituted the absolute majority in the region), at the same time that the Peć patriarchy was restored. Hence, their efforts not only to expel the entire Serb population from western Slavonia but also to totally eradicate all traces of its spirituality.

In this latest aggression against western Slavonia, more than 9,000 Serbian houses were torn down. The bridge on the Sava River was blown up to prevent Serbian refugees from coming back. The remaining Orthodox churches were destroyed, damaged or desecrated. Croatian propaganda reports that the Orthodox churches in Jasenovac and Okucani remained intact. For the sake of truth, it needs to be said that in Jasenovac, the Church of Saint John the Baptist was erected in 1775 but was set afire in 1941 by the fascist regime of the "Independent State of Croatia". A new church was built in 1984 but was damaged in the wake of shelling by the Tudjman armed formations in 1991. On 1 May 1995, it was again looted, demolished and desecrated. The Church of Saint Demetrius in Okucani was erected in 1752 and destroyed by the "Independent State of Croatia" in 1942. A new Orthodox church, built in 1969, was damaged in 1991 by the armed forces of the Zagreb authorities and then again suffered further damage in the latest Croatian aggression on 1 May 1995. The entry gate has been torn down, all windows have been smashed, the chalice filled with spit and cigarette butts. Close to the eastern gate of the church, in the churchyard, a large hole has been dug and the surrounding soil has been covered with blood. Based on past experience of the "Independent State of Croatia", the present Croatian authorities obviously consider that it is better to expel all Serbs than to totally raze their churches. In his May address in Okucani this year, President Tudjman said that, instead of Serbs, Croats will now live in Okucani.

As can be seen from the above-mentioned letter, the Zagreb authorities tend to resort to half-truths and falsification of historical facts. In the same vein, the letter alleges that in Banja Luka the Serbs have always been a minority population. To support this claim, they refer to the 1948 census, according to which there were only 34.8 per cent of Serbs in Banja Luka. In doing so, they deliberately chose not to mention how many Serbs were there in 1931, 1981 and 1991. In fact, in 1931, in Banja Luka, there were 59.9 per cent, in 1981, 50.9 per cent and in 1991, 54.8 per cent. Only in the 1948 census, did Serbs not constitute an absolute majority (only a relative one) because of the genocide committed against them by the Pavelic "Independent State of Croatia" (in the Jasenovac concentration camp, in the period 1941-1945, from the Banja Luka region and western Slavonia alone, close to 500,000 Serbs were killed). The Zagreb authorities are well aware of this fact, as well as of the fact that in the multi-party Assembly of Banja Luka, there are both Croat and Muslim

representatives. The Vice-President of the Executive Council of Banja Luka is Anton Ruzic, a Croat. One of the representatives in the Assembly of Banja Luka, who actively participates in its work, is the President of the Croatian Democratic Community for Banja Luka, Nikola Gabelic. In other words, Banja Luka is not an ethnically clean town, whereas many towns in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Serbs were an absolute or relative majority, are ethnically cleansed of Serbs (e.g., Zadar, Sibenik, Pakrac, Mostar) or their number has been drastically reduced (Zagreb, Split, Dubrovnik, Osijek, Tuzla, Zenica and others).

The letter of the Croatian representative to the United Nations contains harsh falsehoods on ethnic cleansing in Vojvodina. The Zagreb authorities know that more than 400,000 Serbs have been expelled from Croatia with meagre possessions in hand. On the other side, from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, citizens are free to leave if they wish to do so, not because they are forced to leave. In that case, they can take all their possessions. Owing to United Nations sanctions imposed against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia a large percentage of those who leave are also Serbs. When the sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are lifted, the process of emigration will stop.

The allegations contained in the letter of the Croatian representative about the harassment of Croatian refugees from eastern Slavonia (Republic of Serb Krajina) in Morovic near Sid in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are totally senseless. The refugees, 83 of them, not 500, as alleged by the Croatian authorities, have been well received in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. They are now accommodated in the motel "One Thousand Roses" in the vicinity of Belgrade and have been taken care of by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and will be allowed to leave for destinations they choose themselves and according to which States accept them.

It is not surprising that the Croatian authorities repeatedly insist that documents of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia not be circulated in the United Nations. Their intention is to obscure the truth and they are positive they can win support in the United Nations for that purpose. The report of 21 May 1995 of the Organization to Coordinate the Protection of Human Rights in the Republic of Croatia, on its visit in the area of western Slavonia (region of Pakrac), indicates the non-existence of lists of persons taken to collection points, released and detained persons in the district jails, the non-existence of lists of the wounded or place of their hospitalization, the non-existence of lists of those killed or the sites of their burial. It is evident that the Zagreb authorities are trying to cover up all crimes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

For those reasons, we feel it is necessary that the United Nations and its relevant bodies and organs conduct an efficient and thorough investigation of the crimes committed against the Serb civilian population in western Slavonia and against other categories of protected populations in armed conflicts, namely, prisoners of war, the wounded and sick members of the armed forces of the army of the Republic of Serb Krajina.

The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia does not have any doubts about what the investigation in UNPA Sector West is going to indicate. Consequently, all those in the United Nations will be able to see for themselves who is really advancing disinformation in United Nations documents and instigating hate and religious intolerance.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under item 81 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Dragomir DJOKIĆ
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.
